

English Civil Wars

Queen Elizabeth was followed to the throne by James VI of Scotland, who became James I of England. James believed in the absolute power of the monarchy, and he had a rocky relationship with an increasingly vocal and demanding Parliament.

James I was a firm protestant, and in 1604 he expelled all Catholic priests from the island. This was one of the factors which led to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. A group of Catholic plotters planned to blow up Parliament when it opened on November 5. However, an anonymous letter betrayed the plot and most of the plotters were captured and executed.

During James I's reign Protestant groups called Puritans began to gain a sizeable following. Puritans wanted to "purify" the church by paring down church ritual, educating the clergy, and limiting the powers of bishops. King James resisted this last. The powers of the church and king were too closely linked. "No bishop, no king," he said.

The Puritans also favored thrift, education, and individual initiative, therefore they found great support among the new middle class of merchants, the powers in the Commons.

James I's attitude toward Parliament was clear. He commented in 1614 that he was surprised his ancestors "should have permitted such an institution to come into existence It is sedition in subjects to dispute what a king may do in the height of his power".

In 1611 the King James Version of the Holy Bible was issued, the result of seven years of labor by the best translators and theological minds of the day. It remained the authoritative, though not necessarily the most accurate, version of the Bible for centuries.

Charles, the third child and second son of James I, was born in Dunfermline Palace on November 19, 1600. After the death of his older brother, Henry, in 1612, Charles was given the title of Prince of Wales and became the heir to the throne. James I died on March 27, 1625.

When Charles I ascended to the throne in 1625, the British Isles were divided with several religious, political and social factions that had been growing since the late Tudor period.

Within four years of Charles's coronation, these had manifested into deep disagreements between king and Parliament. Charles married fifteen-year-old Henrietta Maria; many members of the House of Commons were opposed to the king's marriage to a Roman Catholic.

Charles I (1625-49) continued his father's hostile relationship with Parliament, squabbling over the right to levy taxes. Parliament responded with the Petition of Right in 1628.



It was the most dramatic assertion of the traditional rights of the English people since the Magna Carta. Its basic premise was that no taxes of any kind could be allowed without the permission of Parliament.

Charles I finally had enough, and in 1629 he dissolved Parliament and ruled without it for eleven years. Some of the ways he raised money during this period were of dubious legality by the standards of the time. (Most in this section is from David Ross)

Ultimately, the conflict between the King and Parliament led to civil war.

Civil Wars

The English Civil Wars was three wars fought in England between those loyal to Charles I and those supporting Parliament, in 1642–6, 1648 and 1649–51.

They centered around a power struggle between King Charles I and Parliament, with battle lines drawn over deep-seated and complex divisions in politics, religion and economic policy. Families and communities at all levels of society were drawn into the conflict, and many suffered great losses.



At the heart of the upheaval was a radical challenge to the absolute power of the monarch – one which resulted in the only ever execution of a British monarch and the sole period of Republican rule in British history.

The wars forever altered the relationship between monarch and Parliament, stirring questions of power and democracy that led to the long, slow rise of Parliament as the main instrument of power in the land. (English Heritage)

When Charles I ascended to the throne in 1625, the British Isles were divided with several religious, political and social factions that had been growing since the late Tudor period. Within four years of Charles's coronation, these had manifested into deep disagreements between king and Parliament.

But war was not inevitable. A political settlement proved elusive partly because of deeply held, opposing views on all sides, and the situation was compounded by a few key personalities, including Charles I as well as some members of Parliament, who simply refused to compromise or sacrifice any of their own principles.

There was no single cause of the wars, but three main sources of discontent emerged in the early years of Charles I's reign, Politics, Religion and Economics.

Politics

Charles believed in the 'Divine Right of Kings' – that monarchs were appointed by God, and that he could govern his kingdoms personally, taking advice from a Privy Council that he appointed. Charles expected MPs to do as he commanded.

However, Parliament had already developed a role in government, with powers to raise taxes, to make law and to allocate money for the king's use. Charles's arbitrary use of power was therefore a source of anger and frustration for MPs and others who had ideas for a more inclusive government.

Religion

Matters of politics were deeply entangled with religion. The Church of England was Protestant but there were many nonconformist sects – including Presbyterians and Puritans – who believed that worship should be plain and congregational.

Many still followed the old faith – Catholicism – and were considered as dangerous people who wanted to bring back 'Popery' and subjugation to Rome. There was a perception among several Protestant sects, especially Puritans, that the king favored Catholicism, or at least wanted to tolerate it. This concern was further fueled by Charles's marriage to a Catholic princess, Henrietta Maria of France, and his promotion of a ceremonial 'high church' in the Church of England.

Economics

Economic factors also played a part, with arbitrary and heavy taxes levied by the king being a burden on many people. In the early years of Charles's reign, Parliament was particularly enraged by the king's conduct of the war with Spain (1625–9) that ended in costly and humiliating failure.

In 1626, Members of Parliament refused to vote more money for the war, so the king resorted to desperate and unpopular measures, raising money through forced loans, with imprisonment for refusal.

In 1628, Parliament produced the Petition of Right, a list of demands to prevent the king's misuse of law and taxation. The king, needing money to be granted by Parliament, gave in. However, he dismissed Parliament in 1629 and did not recall it for 11 years – a period that became known as the Personal Rule.

King versus Parliament

Compared with the chaos unleashed by the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) on the European continent, the British Isles under Charles I enjoyed relative peace and economic prosperity during the 1630s.

However, by the later 1630s, Charles's regime had become unpopular across a broad front throughout his kingdoms. During the period of his so-called Personal Rule (1629–40), known by his enemies as the "Eleven-Year Tyranny" because he had dissolved Parliament and ruled by decree, Charles had resorted to expansion of the "ship money" levy.

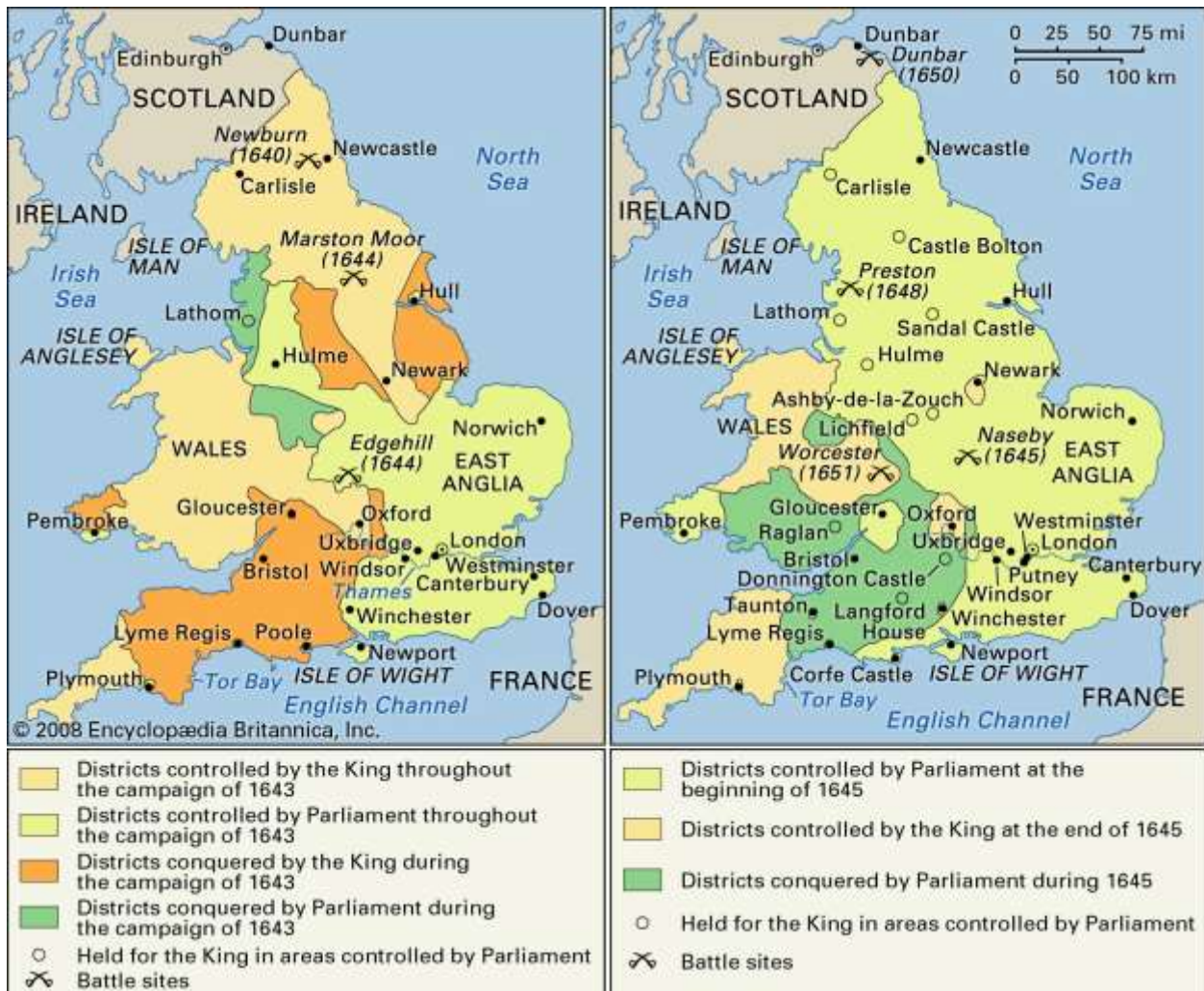
Ship money was a nonparliamentary tax first levied in medieval times by the English crown on coastal cities and counties for naval defense in time of war. It required those being taxed to furnish a certain number of warships or to pay the ships' equivalent in money. (Britannica)

Charles I extended the levy from English ports to inland towns. This inclusion of inland towns was construed as a new tax without parliamentary authorization.

Over time, Parliament made increasing demands, which the king refused to meet. Neither side was willing to budge. Finally in 1642 fighting broke out.

The English Civil Wars are traditionally considered to have begun in England in August 1642, when Charles I raised an army against the wishes of Parliament, ostensibly to deal with a rebellion in Ireland. But the period of conflict actually began earlier in Scotland, with the Bishops' Wars of 1639–40, and in Ireland, with the Ulster rebellion of 1641.

The war began as a series of indecisive skirmishes notable for not much beyond the emergence of a Parliamentary general from East Anglia named Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell transformed his erratic volunteer troops into the disciplined New Model Army.



Throughout the 1640s, war between King and Parliament ravaged England, but it also struck all of the kingdoms held by the house of Stuart - and, in addition to war between the various British and Irish dominions, there was civil war within each of the Stuart states.

For this reason the English Civil Wars might more properly be called the British Civil Wars or the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. The wars finally ended in 1651 with the flight of Charles II to France and, with him, the hopes of the British monarchy.

It was a war that was as dangerous to win as to lose. The parliamentarians could only maintain the fiction that they were fighting to “preserve the safety of the king,” as the commission of their commander, Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, stated. The king’s fiction was that he was opposing a rebellion. Most of the country remained neutral, hoping that differences would be composed and fighting ended.

It has been estimated that the conflict in England and Wales claimed about 85,000 lives in combat, with a further 127,000 noncombat deaths (including some 40,000 civilians). The fighting in Scotland and Ireland, where the populations were roughly a fifth of that of England, was more brutal still.

As many as 15,000 civilians perished in Scotland, and a further 137,000 Irish civilians may well have died as a result of the wars there.

In all nearly 200,000 people, or roughly 2.5 percent of the civilian population, lost their lives directly or indirectly as a result of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms during this decade, making the Civil Wars arguably the bloodiest conflict in the history of the British Isles. (Britannica)



Oliver Cromwell depicted at the Battle of Marston Moor in 1644, in a painting by Ernest Croft

War’s Impact on the American Colonies

The outbreak of civil war between the King and Parliament opened an opportunity for the English state to consolidate its hold over the American colonies. In 1642, no permanent British North American colony was more than 35 years old. The crown and various proprietors controlled most of the colonies, but settlers from Barbados to Maine enjoyed a great deal of independence.

This was especially true in Massachusetts Bay, where Puritan settlers governed themselves according to the colony's 1629 charter. Trade in tobacco and naval stores tied the colonies to England economically, as did religion and political culture, but in general the English left the colonies to their own devices.

The English civil war forced settlers in America to reconsider their place within the empire. Older colonies like Virginia and proprietary colonies like Maryland sympathized with the crown. Newer colonies like Massachusetts Bay, populated by religious dissenters taking part in the Great Migration of the 1630s, tended to favor Parliament.

Between 1630-43 large numbers of people emigrated from England as Archbishop Laud tried to impose uniformity on the church. Up to 60,000 people left, one-third of them to the new American colonies. Several areas lost a large part of their populations, and laws were enacted to curb the outflow.

Yet during the war the colonies remained neutral, fearing that support for either side could involve them in war. Even Massachusetts Bay, which nurtured ties to radical Protestants in Parliament, remained neutral. (American Yawp)

Parliament won the war, Charles I was executed, and England transformed into a republic and protectorate under Oliver Cromwell.

Charles I's execution in 1649 altered that neutrality. Six colonies, including Virginia and Barbados, declared open allegiance to the dead monarch's son, Charles II. Parliament responded with an Act in 1650 that leveled an economic embargo on the rebelling colonies, forcing them to accept Parliament's authority.

The establishment of England's new Commonwealth government would have ended Virginia's status as a royal colony, except that Virginia resisted this change. Rather than remain tied to England under the circumstances, Virginia was one of a number of colonies to proclaim Charles II king in 1649.

In part as a response to Virginia's inflexibility, the Commonwealth enacted a set of uniform policies for all colonies with the intention of linking them more closely to England. One such policy was the Navigation Act (1651), which limited colonial trade to English merchants and vessels in the hope that the wealth produced by the colonies would benefit England alone.

When Virginians resisted, Parliament blockaded the colony, forcing Governor Berkeley to surrender on March 12, 1652. Still, the General Assembly managed to negotiate free trade as one of its terms, circumventing the Navigation Act. Ironically, the law was later revived under Charles II.

After surrendering 1652, Virginia was ruled directly by the English government until the Restoration of 1660. Though Parliament forced Berkeley to step down as governor after the surrender, the colony was able to elect its own governor and Council - officeholders who had previously been appointed by the king.

The governor's Council elected Berkeley to another term as governor in March 1660, just two months before Charles II was restored to the throne.

On his 30th birthday (May 29, 1660), Charles II sailed from the Netherlands to his restoration after nine years in exile. He was received in London to great acclaim.

England found itself in crisis after the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658, leading in time to the reestablishment of the monarchy.

Charles II ruled effectively, but his successor, James II, made several crucial mistakes. Eventually, Parliament again overthrew the authority of their king, this time turning to the Dutch Prince William of Holland and his English bride, Mary, the daughter of James II. This relatively peaceful coup was called the Glorious Revolution.

English colonists in the era of the Glorious Revolution experienced religious and political conflict that reflected transformations in Europe. It was a time of great anxiety for the colonists. In the 1670s, King Charles II tightened English control over America, creating the royal colony of New Hampshire in 1678, and transforming Bermuda into a crown colony in 1684.

The King's death in 1685 and subsequent rebellions in England and Scotland against the new Catholic monarch, James II, threw Bermuda into crisis. Irregular reports made it unclear who was winning or who would protect their island. Bermudians were not alone in their wish for greater protection.

On the mainland, Native Americans led by Metacom - or as the English called him, King Philip - devastated New England between 1675 and 1678 while Indian conflicts helped trigger Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia in 1676. Equally troubling, New France loomed, and many remained wary of Catholics in Maryland. In the colonists' view, Catholics and Indians sought to destroy English America.

James II worked to place the colonies on firmer defensive footing by creating the Dominion of New England in 1686. Colonists had accepted him as king despite his religion but began to suspect him of possessing absolutist ambitions.

The Dominion consolidated the New England colonies plus New York and New Jersey into one administrative unit to counter French Canada, but colonists decried the loss of their individual provinces. The Dominion's governor, Sir Edmund Andros, did little to assuage fears of arbitrary power when he impressed colonists into military service for a campaign against Maine Indians in early 1687.

In England, James's push for religious toleration brought him into conflict with Parliament and the Anglican establishment. Fearing that James meant to destroy Protestantism, a group of bishops and Parliamentarians asked William of Orange, the Protestant Dutch Stadtholder, and James's son-in-law, to invade the country in 1688.

When the king fled to France in December, Parliament invited William and Mary to take the throne, and colonists in America declared allegiance to the new monarchs. They did so in part to maintain order in their respective colonies. As one Virginia official explained, if there was "no King in England, there was no Government here." A declaration of allegiance was therefore a means toward stability.

More importantly, colonists declared for William and Mary because they believed their ascension marked the rejection of absolutism and confirmed the centrality of Protestantism in English life. Settlers joined in the revolution by overthrowing the Dominion government, restoring the provinces to their previous status, and forcing out the Catholic-dominated Maryland government.

They launched several assaults against French Canada as part of "King William's War," and rejoiced in Parliament's 1689 passage of a Bill of Rights, which curtailed the power of the monarchy and cemented

Protestantism in England. For English colonists, it was indeed a “glorious” revolution as it united them in a Protestant empire that stood counter to Catholic tyranny, absolutism, and French power. (American Yawp)

The biggest effect it had on the colonies was probably that it drove at least 3 separate waves of migration from England to America.

Before the war, the bulk of settlers were puritans from east of England came and settled in the northeast. After the war, most were former cavaliers, mostly from the south of England, who settled the Chesapeake and southern coasts..

After the restoration, there was as second wave of “puritans” but this time they were mostly from the north midlands, not east Anglia, who settled Pennsylvania and the surrounding area. These three areas all had profoundly different cultural attitudes, and settling in America made them starker, not milder. (American Yawp)

Lots here is copied and pasted from UK National Archives; Britannica; American Yawp; David Ross; Virginia Encyclopedia; UK Parliament; John Simkin; Virginia Humanities; English Heritage.

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the Mayflower, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young